

## WHAT DO THOSE PRESCRIPTION INSTRUCTIONS REALLY MEAN?

Have you ever been confused by the instructions on your prescriptions? If so, you may not be alone. The way to avoid problems with medications is to make sure you clearly understand what your prescription instructions mean before you leave the pharmacy.

Ask your pharmacist to explain the directions for use if you do not understand them. That way, you will be sure of exactly how to take your medicine. The directions on the label serve as a reminder of the more complete set of instructions your physician, other prescriber, or pharmacist gave you face-to-face.

*The following list of common instructions and their meaning are provided:*

### **Take on an empty stomach.**

Food and some beverages in your stomach may interfere with the absorption of certain medications, or slow the time it takes them to begin working. To avoid these pitfalls, when indicated, take the medication either one hour before, or two hours after, eating or drinking. You should take all medications with a full glass of water.

### **Take one dose four times daily.**

Over a 24-hour period, this medication should be taken four times, with about six hours between each dose. Spacing the four doses over the entire day will ensure a constant level of medication in your body. Most medications with this direction will work fine if taken four times during the time you are awake (for example, at breakfast, lunch, supper, and bedtime). Ask your pharmacist which is the right for your medication. Remember to make arrangements for your children to receive their medications at the proper times while at school or daycare.

### **Keep in refrigerator.**

Medications requiring storage in the refrigerator should be generally kept at a temperature between 36-46 degrees Fahrenheit to maintain their potency. Refrigerate only medications that have this instruction. Refrigerating other medications could cause them to lose their effectiveness because of low temperature and high humidity. Medication should not be kept in the freezer unless directions specifically state so.

### **Avoid prolonged exposure to sunlight.**

This means **you**, not the medication. Certain medications, such as “sulfa” drugs and tetracyclines, may make you more sensitive to sunlight and tanning lamps; causing you to burn more easily. You should limit exposure to the sun when you are taking these medications. If your skin does become more sensitive, use a sunscreen (SPF 15 or more), avoid spending a long time in the sun, and wear protective clothing.

### **May cause discoloration of urine or feces.**

Some medication may change the color of your urine or stools. This effect is not harmful and will stop when the medication is discontinued. If you are unsure, ask your pharmacist what to expect. Otherwise, any unexpected change should be reported to your doctor.

If you wear soft contact lenses, do not wear them during treatment with this type of medication. The medication may discolor your tears. This could permanently stain the contact lenses. Ask your doctor or pharmacist how long to wait after discontinuing the medication before wearing your lenses again.

**Shake well.**

The active ingredient in many liquid medications is in the form of a fine powder, which can settle to the bottom of the bottle. To be sure you receive the correct amount of active ingredient, shake the bottle vigorously for 15-30 seconds every time you take the medication.